

Eduardo H. Gato House
(Mercedes Hospital, El
Patio Apartments)
1209 Virginia Street
Key West
Monroe County
Florida

HABS No. FL-186

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

EDUARDO H. GATO HOUSE
(Mercedes Hospital, El Patio Apartments)

HABS No. FL -186

Location: 1209 Virginia Street, Key West, Monroe County, Florida
USGS Key West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 17.419960. 2715800.

Present Owner: Mrs. Rollin A. Cowart.

Present Occupants: Mr. and Mrs. Rollin A. Cowart and tenants.

Present Use: Apartment house.

Significance: The building was constructed as a residence by Eduardo H. Gato, a Cuban immigrant who made a fortune in the cigar business. Although of wood construction with Victorian trim, typical of the late nineteenth century, the large building's central courtyard is reminiscent of Cuban architecture.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1890.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: In 1887 Edward (Eduardo) H. Gato purchased the northeast portion (1/3) of tract 14. (Deed Book O, p.825). Gato built his home on that part of his lot which faced the waterfront. In 1919 this property was sold to the City of Key West, and later became Bayview Park (Deed Book A-4, p.49). The building was moved about this time to its present location.

In 1945, the Gato Real Estate and Improvement Company sold the building and the lot on which it stood to G.W. Drummond (Deed Book G-17, p. 227). He in turn sold part of the lot and the building to Mrs. Lisa Parker Cowart in 1961. (Cowart interview, September 16, 1966).

4. Builder: No records have been found. It has been said that the house was built by Cuban carpenters brought here by Mr. Gato. There were, however, several other buildings which show some similarity to the Gato home built about this time, the William Curry Sons building and the Key West Armory.

5. Original plan and construction: A square, two-story, frame building with a two-story veranda extending across three bays of the seven bay facade and covering all four sides of an inner courtyard.
6. Alterations and additions: The building has been extensively re-modeled several times. Its original residential interior has been adapted to serve as a school, a hospital and an apartment house. The exterior has been neglected and had only a minimum amount of repairs. It is probable that some of the original decorative features have been lost.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

In 1900 the building was leased to the Woman's Board of Home Missions, Methodist Episcopal Church South, for use as a school until the Ruth Hargrove Hall was completed in 1901 (Browne, pp. 24-25).

In 1911 Mr. Gato permitted a philanthropic group of Cuban residents of Key West to use the building for a hospital for the indigent of all nations. October 10 of that year the Casa de la Pobre Mercedes Hospital was dedicated. It was named Mercedes in honor of Mrs. Gato (Browne, p. 149).

After the City of Key West purchased the site on which the building stood, the building was relocated on Gato property on 1209 Virginia Street. As a hospital, it operated until just previous to World War II. It was closed, for lack of funds, and the building and property returned to the Gato interests.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Historical collection, photographs, Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida: one photograph of the building on its original site, n.d., taken from too great a distance to show architectural features.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Monroe County Courthouse Records and Deed Books,
County Clerk's Office, Key West, Florida.

- b. Secondary and unpublished sources:

Browne, Jefferson B., Key West, The Old and the New,
The Record Co., St. Augustine, Florida, 1912. pp 24-25, 149.

c. Interviews:

Mrs. Lisa Parker Cowart, Key West, Florida, September 16, 1966.

3. Likely sources not yet investigated:

The 1889 Sanborn Company Maps do not show this area. Later Sanborn Maps of the City of Key West may show some information.

Miss Anita H. Gato, 327 Manor Road, Coral Gables, Florida, is a direct descendant of Eduardo H. Gato. This researcher has not received an answer to inquiries sent to the family.

Prepared by: Betty M. Bruce
Old Island Restoration
Foundation, Inc.
Project Historian
HABS Key West Project
August 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The wood trim and two-story veranda are late nineteenth century architectural styles. The large, central inner courtyard may reflect the Cuban origin of the original owner.
2. Condition of fabric: Some deterioration.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: A two-story square building measuring 70' by 40' with seven bays across the facade.
2. Foundation: Brick piers.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Lapped wood siding, painted white.
4. Structural system, framing: Balloon frame.
5. Porches: A three bay, two-story veranda on the front of the building has turned columns with composite mold capitals and decorative curvilinear wood brackets. The balustrade at both levels has molded hand and bottom rails and turned balusters.

A single bay, one-story stoop with square posts supporting a balcony with a plain balustrade on southwest elevation.

A two-story veranda covers all four sides of the inner courtyard. It has square wood posts with composite molded capitals, a balustrade with molded hand and bottom rails and turned balusters.

6. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: High arched doorways with molded wood archivolts, some upper panels glazed with four triangular lights, others infilled with vertical boards; double doors have four panels each.
- b. Windows and shutters: Arched openings with molded wood archivolts, two-over-two-light double hung sash, some shutters.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape covering: Low pitched roof covered with slate shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Boxed eaves and cornice frieze with undersized ogee brackets.
- c. Cupolas: Four cupolas, one at each corner, hipped roof, louvered sides.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plans: rooms on both floors are arranged around the central inner courtyard. Two enclosed stairways, one at each side, run from the first to the second floors.

D. Site:

The building faces southeast. Large tropical trees and plants have been neglected.

Prepared by: Charles E. McCoy, Jr.,
Architect
Old Island Restoration
Foundation, Inc.,
HABS Key West Project
September 16, 1966

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared in 1967 during a summer project jointly sponsored by the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc. of Key West, and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Twenty-two structures were recorded, ranging from commercial structures, residences and hospitals to a convent, a lighthouse, and the Memorial to the Victims of the Disaster of the U.S. Battleship Maine.

The project was under the direction of F. Blair Reeves, AIA, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Florida. Measured drawings were prepared by student architects John D. Davenport and John F. Grimm of Texas A. and M. University, and John O. Crosby of the University of Florida. Mrs. Betty M. Bruce of the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc., and Professor Reeves were responsible for the historical and architectural data. They were assisted by members of the Foundation. J. Franks Brooks, Photographer, of Key West, supplied the photographs.